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Foreignization and Heterogeneity in the English Translations of Two Judeo-Spanish Folktales by Matilda Koén-Sarano

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In the 1980s Matilda Koén-Sarano realized that her native language, Judeo-Spanish was in serious decline and embarked on a mission to preserve as much of it as she could. She harnessed her background in Folk Studies and began collecting folktales from the oral tradition and publishing them; she has since published hundreds of tales in over a dozen books. This is but one of the preservation efforts currently underway, but the grim reality is that no speakers today are using the language as their primary form of communication and few, if any, are transmitting it to the younger generations. However, Koén-Sarano's work contributes more to the language than meets the eye.

Simply put, Judeo-Spanish is the language of the Sephardic Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492 and resettled in Morocco and the Ottoman Empire. While it shares many features with modern Spanish, it is in fact descended not only from Castilian, but also from Portuguese, Catalan, Aragonese, and other Iberian languages. In addition to these influences it has significant vocabulary from Turkish, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Bulgarian, Bosnian, Serbo-Croatian, and other languages that it came into contact with over the past five centuries. Consequently, and due to phonetic shifts that affected Castilian and not Judeo-Spanish, the spoken language is not largely mutually intelligible with modern Spanish (Attig 832).

Prior to Koén-Sarano relatively little had been written in Judeo-Spanish. Beginning as early as the sixteenth century many Sephardim – the name for Jews who can trace their ancestry to Spain – had translated calques of biblical or rabbinical works to be used as didactic tools, and later in the nineteenth century others translated highly Gallicized versions of novels and plays, but Koén-Sarano is one of the few authors to publish original works in this language variety in a way that replicates how speakers use the language in their daily lives. This is in part because these texts are copied from the oral tradition and published in a way that replicates the speakers' own usage of the language. Below are two of her stories, originally published in her first collection, *Kuentos del folklor de la famiya djudeo-esparyola* (1986), and my English translations.

The aforementioned difference between Judeo-Spanish and Castilian, the orality of these tales, as well as the primary preoccupations of the author – to preserve her culture's folktales in writing – led me to conclude that a domesticated translation would not suffice; written fluency must be broken and orality must be reproduced. To achieve this goal I looked to Venuti's notions of both "foreignization" and "heterogeneity". In the former, Venuti advocates for making the foreign visible in the translation (Venuti, *Invisibility* 33-34). To do this I considered the most important element that contributed to the birth of Judeo-Spanish as a separate language variety from Castilian, the Jewish identity of its speakers. Since we believe that the Jews did not speak Spanish differently than their Christian counterparts prior to the expulsion, it was through the exile itself that Judeo-Spanish was born (Bunis 403). In attempting to pay homage to this defining element, I looked at how some writers have written Jewish English, most notably Mordecai Richler as his work makes clear syntactic and lexical distinctions between different generations of Jewish English speakers in a way that is more diverse than many other authors who have written Jewish English. The following examples, from

his novel *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959), demonstrate how he uses Yiddish expressions and syntactical structures to replicate how his characters speak:

“We know to deal with *tuchusleckers* here,” he [Duddy] said ... Two minutes later Duddy shot up in his seat. “Sir, there’s something I’d like to ask you. I’ve been looking at my hist’ry book and I see there’s only one paragraph on the Spanish inquisition. You don’t even mention it in class, so seeing we got lots of time now I thought you might like to tell us something about it.”

(Richler 35)

“Your Uncle Benjy with all his money is nothing too. Of your father I won’t even speak.”

(Richler 49)

In the first of the two tales that follow, *La Kadena de Arena* (Koén-Sarano 247-250), I attempt to harness similar models to highlight the Jewish nature of Koén-Sarano’s work in a way that would resonate with an English-speaking reader.

For the second tale, *Mazal and Hawd-Werk* (Koén-Sarano 177-180), I built on the previous approach, this time harnessing Venuti’s later notion of “heterogeneity”, itself a form of foreignization. Through the notion of heterogeneity, Venuti advocates for translating in a way that highlights the strangeness of the text to the translating culture – without necessarily bringing the reader to the source culture – thus requiring the reader to struggle. Ideally this would force the reader to recognize that the work is a translation and foreign/strange to the translating culture (Venuti *Scandals* 8-30). Keeping this in mind, and still desiring to focus on the Jewish context of this folktale, I attempted to translate into a phonetic approximation of a Jewish-English accent from New York City. This accent, along with the Montreal Jewish English that Richler invokes are closely related and would be familiar to a wide range of global English speakers. While there are sizeable Jewish communities in places like Sydney, Johannesburg and London – each with different varieties of Jewish English – none are as large or visible on the international scene as the nearly 2.5 million Jews who live in the Northeast US, Toronto and Montreal. Furthermore, a decades-long history of internationally syndicated television shows featuring Jewish accents from this region – such as *Rhoda* (1974-78), *Welcome Back Kotter* (1975-79), *Seinfeld* (1989-98), *The Nanny* (1993-99), *Will and Grace* (1998-2005, 2017-2018), *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000-current) and more – would conjure up Jewish references in the mind of many Anglophones from around the world in a way that other Jewish Englishes may not. To accomplish my goal I respected the syntactical difference that can be observed in Richler’s writings, but drew inspiration from the aforementioned shows and other Jewish film characters to render the spelling in a way that would make the English reader feel uncomfortable and out of place while conjuring a thick Jewish accent from Brooklyn or Queens.

No translation approach can possibly bring all of the cultural context and poetics of a work into a different language and we must make choices, prioritizing one element at the expense of another. At the outset of this introduction I stated that my primary goals were 1) to highlight the distance between global Spanish and Judeo-Spanish – the latter being a community language that has only rarely been written, has never been standardized and has never spread across an empire; 2) to replicate in some way the

author's focus on preserving her own culture; and 3) to render in English the orality of the source texts that had been copied down from stories told verbally to the author. I believe these translations do that.

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La Kadena de Arena
By
Matilda Koén-Sarano

Unos kuantos mansevos, asentados un día en un kafé, estaban avlando entre eyos, i estaban diziendo ke los viejos no aprestan, ke es mantenerlos en vazío, i ke kale ke se arrondjen de la sivdá.

El rey Shelomó, ke estava degizado entre eyos, sintiendo esto, se vino al palasio, yamó a todos los mansevos de la sivdá, ke vengan, ke los kere ver. Kuando ya vinieron, les disho: “Ya es verdá! Ke los estamos aziendo a estos viejos? Kale ke los ekspulsemos de la sivdá!”. “Bravo,” le disheron los mansevos a Shelomó, “ke estamos pensando kom’a él!”. I así fue echo.

Ma uno de los mansevos, ke kiría mucho bien a su padre, lo guadró en la musandará, i le preparava i le yevava todo lo ke tenía demenester para bivar: la kumida, la agua, el po... I ansina lo izo bivar al padre durante un mes.

Un mes después Shelomó los yamó a los mansevos i les disho: “Kale ke entro un mes me aprontésh una kadena de arena! Si no, mos vo a meter en prezo!”

Los mansevos, ke no savían naturalmente komo se aze una kadena de arena, estaban lokos de estrechura i de espanto, i provaron en muchas maneras, ma no riuseron a nada.

El mansevo, ke guadró al padre, estava tanto triste, ke se ulvidó del padre i lo deshó sin komer i sin agua. Después de tres días se akodró d’él i suvió arriva.

The Chain of Sand
By
Matilda Koén-Sarano
Translated by Remy Attig

Once there was, seated at a café talking, a group of youths. What do you suppose they were saying but that old people, they’re not so useful. Supporting them, they said, is for nothing. We should throw them out of the city, they said.

But, who do you suppose was amongst them disguised? I’ll tell you who. Shlomo hamelech—King Solomon, that’s who! Away he went to the palace and called all of the youth of the city that they should appear before him. And appear they did and he said: “It’s true, it is, what you say. What we’re doing with all these old people all over? All of them, they should be expelled from the city!” “Mazal tov,” they all replied. “That we should all be so wise, as to think like him!” And so it was.

But one of the young men, he loved his father very much, so what should he do but hide him in the attic. As if that weren’t enough he prepared and brought him everything he should need to live: he brought him food, and water, even he brought him the to..., anyway, and that’s how he kept his father alive for a whole month.

A month later, Shlomo hamelech, he summoned the young men to him and said to them, he said: “You have one month, I want you should make for me a chain of sand. If you don’t succeed, then jail it is!”

The shmos, that they should know how to make a chain of sand! By the end of the month, mashuganne, the whole lot. They tried and tried... Bupkis!

But the one, the mentch, so upset he was at this that he forgot about his father. Three days he left him without so much as a nosh. Finally, when he

Le disho el padre: “Kualo akontesió ke por tres días me deshates sin komer i sin nada?”. I el ijo le kontó lo ke el rey les demandó, pena la prezión.

Le disho el padre: “Si es sólo esto! ... A la ora orada ya te vo a dizir yo komo se aze la kadena de arena!”. Yeno de aligría, el mansevo fue onde sus amigos i les disho: “Ya vos vo a amostar yo komo se aze la kadena de arena!”

A la ora ke el rey los iva a resivir, suvió el mansevo onde el padre i le disho: “Padre, komo es ke se va azer la kadena de arena?”. Le disho el padre: “Ijo mío, demándale al rey komo de kadena es ke kere: de kolié, de barko, de presión?...”

I el ijo le disho al padre: “Esto es lo ke me ivas azer? Si no savías, deké me dishites ke me la vas azer?!”. I el padre le respondió: “Tú dile esto al rey, i verás ke ya va abastar!”

Fue el ijo kon todos los mansevos delante del rey, i se eskondió entre eyos, ma sus amigos al derredor de él empesaron a dizirle: “Ayde, tú dishites ke ya saves” Dí tú al rey komo se aze la kadena de arena!”. I el mansevo, yeno de verguensa, se aserkó al rey i le disho: “Ya es verdá, sinyor rey, ke demandates kadena, ma no mos dishites ke manera de kadena keres: de braso, de barko, de prezión?...”

Le respondió Shelomó: “A! Ken te disho de demandarme esto? Esto no viene de ti!”. “Biva Shelomó!” le respondió el mansevo, “Yo no arrondjé a mi padre de kaza! Yo lo guadrí, i es él ke me dio este konsejo!”

“A bravo!” disho el rey, “Vitesh komo se keren a los viejos? Los mansevos tienen la fuersa i los viejos la sensia. Andá a traer a todos los viejos de los kampos, ke se tienen demenester!”.

remembered and went up to see him the father he said: “What happened that you should leave me three days. No food, no water, nothing for three days?” And so the son told him what the king, he had ordered lest he go to prison.

The father answered: “That’s all?! When it should be time for you to see the king, then, I’m going to tell you how you should make this chain of sand.” Full of nachas the young man went to his friends: “I’ll show you how to make this chain of sand,” he said.

The time came for the king to receive them and the young man he went up to see his father and told him, he said: “Aba, the chain of sand, how do you want I should make it?” “Son,” he replied, “first you must ask the king what kind of chain it is that he wants, a necklace, a chain for a boat, or one for the jail...”

The son said to his father: “That’s all you’re gonna tell me? Meanwhile, if you didn’t know, why not say so?” And the father replied: “Say that to the king...you’ll see.”

Off he went, the son, with all of the young men to the king, and hid among them. But his friends they started ask: “Nu, you said you know how. So you tell the king how to make the chain of sand!” The young man, embarrassed, approached the king. “It’s true, you asked we should make a chain, but still we don’t know what kind; a jewelry chain, a boat chain or a prison chain.”

Solomon replied: “What? Who said you should ask me that? You didn’t think of it yourself!” “A long life to Shlomo hamelech,” replied the man. “My father, I didn’t kick him out of my house! I hid him, and it’s him who gave me this advice.”

“Mazal tov!” said the King, “that’s how you take care of the elderly. Young men, they have the strength, but old men, old men have the wisdom. Go, bring all of the old people from the

Fueron todos los mansevos i trusheron atrás a sus kazas a los padres i a las madres.

El Mazal i el Lavoro
By
Matilda Koén-Sarano

El Mazal i el Lavoro, en forma de dos mansevos, estaban kaminando endjuntos i diskutiendo entre eyos. Disho el Mazal al Lavoro: “Si no ayudo yo a la persona, su lavor no sierve a nada!”

Le respondió el Lavoro: “No es verdá! El mazal sólo no abasta! Si uno lavora parviene presto u tadre a azerse una pozisión!”

En avlando los dos pasaron delante de la butika de un kuedrero, ke azía redes i kuedras para peshkadores, i se kedaron a avlar kon él i le demandaron: “Ke tal? Komo te está indo el echo? Te abasta para bivir?”

Les respondió el kuedrero: “El echo está muy basho i mi vida está muy difisil! No kito ni el pan para dar a komer a mis kriaturas!”

“Deké?” le demandaron los dos.

“Porké no tengo parás para empesar!” les respondió el ombre, “si tinía un poko de kapital, pudría dezvelopar mi echo, i ganar un poko mas de parás, para mantener mas mijor a mi famiya!”

Se miró el Lavoro en l’aldukera, kitó sien liras i se las dio. El ombre, alegre i kontente, serró la butika i se fue al charshí a merkar pishkado, para yevar a komer a su famiya. Tomó el pishkado, pagó i se metió el kusur de las parás en l’aldukera. Entre mientras pasó por ay un ladrón, le metió la mano en l’aldukera, i

countryside that they should know we need them here!” And away they all went, bringing their fathers and mothers back home.

Mazal and Hawd-Werk
By
Matilda Koén-Sarano
Translated by Remy Attig

Mazal an’ Hawd-Werk, in the shape ov tsew friends, wuh wawkin’ togetha’ and awgyuin’ with each otha’. Mazal¹⁷ said ta Hawd-Werk, she said: “Me, if I don’t help someone, theih werk, it’s bupkes.”

Hawd-Werk ans’e’d ‘e said: “Fooey! mech, that mazal alone shud be anuff? If somewun werks hawd, soona’ oah late’ they’a gunna get ahead in life!”

Awl the wiyel tawkin’, the tsew wawk’t in frunt of a rope sto’ah that made nets an’ ropes fa fisha’min. They stawpt ta speak ta the rope-makeh an askt ‘im: “Howz by you? Howz ya’ bizniss? Yoah makin’ a gut livin’?”

The rope-makeh replioied: “Werk, it’s slow, life, it’s rough, as if that wurint anuff, I can’ affoad bread fa mai kids!”

“Azoy?” they askt ‘im – why?

“Cuz I don’t ‘ave munev ta git things stawded” ans’ed the maen, “oh that I should ‘ave some money, then could I develop mai bizniss, finally could I earn some mo’a munev ta give mai mushpacha a bette’ life.”

Hawd-Werk felt in ‘is pahcket, a hundred liras he tuk owt an’ gave it to ‘im. Bein’ very happy, the man, he closed his stoa’ an’ went to the moakit ta buy fish foa his fahmily. He bawt the fish, paid, and put the rest of the munev in ‘is pahcket. Then, what should happen, but aloang comes a thief. What

¹⁷ The bilingual reader may notice that the gender of the word “Mazal”, meaning “luck”, is masculine in Judeo-Spanish as it is in Hebrew, but the character named Mazal in the English translation is feminine. Mazal is a common female name in Jewish communities and as such I decided to retain the name but change the gender since Luck’s gender is otherwise not a significant element of this short story.

le tomó lo ke le avía kedado de las sien liras. Boltó el prove a su kaza, i se apersivió ke le rovaron las parás!

Pasó tiempo, i otra vez pasaron el Mazal i el Lavoro, ke estaban kaminando endjuntos, por la mizma butika. Se kedaron a avlar kon el mizmo kuedrero i le demandaron: “Ke tal está la vida?”, i él les kontó lo ke le avía afitado. Kitó el Lavoro de nuevo sien liras de l’aldukera i se las dio. Fue el kuedrero i merkó una partida de kányimo para azer kuedras, ma kuando fue para lavorarlo, se apersivió ke estava pudrido. I ansí pedrió las sien liras.

Pasaron mezes i por la tresera vez pasaron los dos mansevos delante de su butika, le repetaron la mizma demanda i resivieron la mizma repuesta. Se bushkó el Lavoro en l’aldukera i no topó mas nada. Entonses bushkó el Mazal en su aldukera i le disho: “Na, lo ke tupí es este pedaso de plomo. Tómallo!” Tomó el ombre el pedaso de plomo, i se fue a kaza, pensando: “A kualo me va a servir este plomo?”

A la noche ensupitó bateó a la puerta del kuedrero un peshkador, ke le demandó: “Tienes por azardo un pedaso de plomo de darme, porké pedrí el pezgo de mi red?” Entonses el kuedrero le dio el pedaso de polomo, ke le avía dado el Mazal. Al día de después vino otra vez a su kaza akel peshkador, i le trusho una resta de pishkados, diziéndole: “sikomo tuvi una buena peskha, te está trayendo estos pishkados, para rengrasiarte ke me ayudates anoche!”

Tomó la mujer los pishkados i empesó a alimpiarlos. Ma, buskhando de avrir uno d’eyos, vido ke el kuchiyo no estava riushendo a kortaldo, porké estava enkontrando una koza dura. Metió la mujer mas muncha atansión i parvino a avrir la tripa del pishkado, i kualo ke tope adientro? Un ermozo aniyo!

‘id the gonif do, but put ‘is hand in the man’s pocket, an’ take what was left of the hundred liras. Arrivin’ home, the poah man found ‘is muney, it was goan!

Some time late’ an’ again Mazal an’ Hawd-Werk wu’ wa’kin’ t’gethe’ an’ past the same stoah. They stopt to speak with the same rope-makeh, they askt ‘im they said: “Howz bei you?” The rope-makeh told ‘em the whole stoari. Again, one hundred liras Hawd-Werk took out and he gave it ta the maen. The rope-makeh went and boahd sum hemp ta make rope, but when he began to work oan it, what should he discove’ it was rotten, the whole lot. And so he loast the hundred liras.

Months past an’ again, fa the third time the tsew wa’ wawkin’ in fron’ a the stoah. Again, they askt the same question an’ gat the same ayntseh. Hawd-Werk again reached in his pocket, gornisht. So Mazal felt around in ha’ packit, she said: “Meh, all I find is this toiny piece a lead, it’s yo’as!” The maen took the lead an’ went home. “Meanwhile, what I’m gunna do with a piece a lead?” he tho’at.

That night a fisha’min knocked at the rope-makeh’s doah, he didn’t expect it. He askt, he said: “Maybe you have a piece a lead ta give me? It’s the weight fa’ my net, I’ve loast it!” So the rope-make’ gave ‘im the lead that Mazal, she’d given ta ‘im. A day late’ who shud come baek to the maen’s house but that same fishe’maen an’ ‘e broat with ‘im a bunch a fish. “So great was my success las’ night that here I am ta thank you fa ya help, hea’s some fish.”

‘Is wife took the fish and she stah’ted ta clean ‘em. Meanwhile, troiyin’ ta cut one ov ‘em open, she soah, that the knife was hittin’ somethin’ sahlid. She focust an’ fainully she succeeded ta cut owpin the fish’s stumik. Wha’did she faind insoid, but a byoodiful ring!

La mujer, yena de aligría, se lo amostró al marido, i él fue pishín onde un djaverdji, para azerlo apresiar. I el djaverdji le propuzó pishín de merkárselo a un buen presio. Viendo esto, provó el kuedrero a amostraldo a otros dos, tres djaverdjís, i lo vendió al ke le dio mas demazía, kitando una fuerte suma de parás, ke lo izo riko.

Pasaron anyos, i un día el Mazal i el Lavoro se toparon a pasar de nuevo por la butika de kuedrero. Se kedaron ay delante i vieron ke se vendían ayá otras kozas.

Demandaron los dos a los viziniso ke si izo de akel kuedrero, i eyos les kontaron ke el ombre topó un trezoro, vendió la butika, metió una fábrica de kuedras i se izo riko. Le disho el Mazal al Lavoro: “Vites? Abastó ke yo le diera una koza de nada, para meteldo a kamino!”

Le respondió el Lavoro a su turno: “Ya tienes razón! Sin tu ayudo él no iva poder nunca empesar! Ma sin el mío no pudría nunca ir a delante!”

The woman, kvelling, showed it ta ha’ hussbend who immediately took it ta a juwleh that ‘e should appraise it. The jeweler oan one foot, oafehd ta bai it frum ‘im at a gut price. When he soah this, the rope-makeh showed it ta two othe’ juwlehs, three in total, an’ sold it ta the one who oafehd him the mowst. Qwait a lot ov muneý ‘e gat foa the ring, enuff to become rich.

Yeas an’ yeas past an’ one day Mazal and Hawd-Werk again past in front ov the rope-makeh’s stoah. They stahpt outside fo’ a moment and soah that now the stoah sold somethin’ else.

Ta awl the neighbuhs they askt what happened ta the rope-makeh. They told them, they said, the man found a treazhu’, sold the stoah, opent a rope-makin’ factory an’ became rich. Mazal said to Hawd-Werk: “See? No soona’ do I give ‘im a smool nothin’ than he stahts oan the path ta success!”

Hawd-Werk ainsehd: “Ya’ right, if not fa yoah help ‘e might never ‘ave stoahsted, but without mine ‘e wouldn’t ‘ave got very foah aithe!”